8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

283 ing it into two ropes, each two fingers wide. She trimmed each rope carefully to make it an even width throughout its length. Any short pieces trimmed off were saved for whip lashes. After trimming, she oiled the ropes with back fat. A single bull hide provided two ropes, each about seventeen feet long. This rope was used for lariats, hackamores, bridles (single strand or plaited), picket lines, hobbles, saddle-rigging straps, stirrup straps, travois ropes, and cords for wrapping bundles and tying them to travois or pack saddles.

281 A buffalo hide to be used for covering a frame saddle was first
391 soaked in a pond or stream for several days until it became green and foul smelling. It was then stretched on the ground, hair side up. Boiling water was thrown on it, and the hair was taken off with a rock. The saddlemaker then turned the hide over and scraped the flesh from the underside with a hide scraper. She then stretched the hide over the saddle frame, fitted it, cut it, and sewed it in place with rawhide cord. She took her stitches on the underside of the saddle, where they would not show when the saddle was in use. To prevent the wooden frame from warping as the rawhide dried and shrunk, she tied the saddle over a log about the width of a horse's back or forced an old rolled-up lodge cover between the side bars and wrapped a rawhide cord around saddle and cover to hold them in place until the saddle cover dried.

281 Of the several types of containers made from single pieces of
415 rawhide—folded, and laced or tied with thongs—the most common was the parfleche. When folded like an envelope, the Blackfoot parfleche was a rectangle about two feet long and fifteen inches wide. Women made them in pairs, one parfleche for each side of a pack horse. A large buffalo hide would yield material for both cases. The craftswoman first soaked the rawhide, with the hair on it, in water, then she pegged it out on the ground, hair side down. She measured the outlines of the cases on the [532] hide with peeled willow sticks. While the hide was still damp, she painted simple geometric designs on the end and side flaps

9: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1955 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

third quarter of the 19th century. It also was the site of a winter trading post operated by Baker and Bro. of Fort Benton, licensed Indian traders in 1868–69 (Bradley, 1923, pp. 346–347).[171]

Bradley, on the basis of information furnished by Alexander Culbertson, stated that in earlier times (ca. 1833) the Piegan wintered on Sun and Teton Rivers and sometimes as far south as the Three Forks of the Missouri. At that time the Blood Indians wintered on the Marias or on Belly River, and the North Blackfoot on Belly and Bow Rivers (Bradley, MSS., Mont. Hist. Soc., book A, p. 179). There is no indication that the Piegan wintered as far south as the Three Forks after 1850.

When geese were seen flying north the Blackfoot knew it was time to leave their winter camps. Beaver bundle owners kept a sort of calendar on notched sticks, one notch representing each day, by means of which they could predict the day on which geese would be sighted in the spring. When the river ice broke up, and before leaving winter camp, the beaver ceremony was held. The approach of spring also was determined by the band chief through observation of the development of embryos taken from buffalo cows killed by hunters. When he noted that the unborn calves began to develop hair he knew spring was near and calves would soon drop. Breakup of the winter camp usually occurred in late March or early April, depending upon the severity of the winter. Thus the nomadic Blackfoot spent at least 5 months of the year in relatively fixed residences.

SPRING HUNTING AND COLLECTING SEASON

March was remembered by elderly Indians as a difficult month during which the buffalo began to drift eastward and northeastward away from the Indians' winter villages. The bands would be forced to subsist on smaller game or go hungry unless they packed and moved after the buffalo. Each band went its separate way in pursuit of buffalo. Buffalo calves generally were born in the period between the end of winter and the annual May storm. Numerous calves were killed for children's robes and soft skin bags. The medicine pipe ceremony, held on the occasion of the first thunder in spring, generally was observed in April or May. It was also the season for making willow back rests, construction and repair of riding gear, and fashioning of warm-weather clothing. During this season the

[171] "In October, 1859, Snowden's detached party of Raynolds' Expedition saw a locality on the South Fork of Cheyenne River, S. Dak., in the Teton Dakota country which was much used by Indians for winter camps because of its natural advantages: "A bottom enclosed and protected by hills, filled with large cottonwood, and young groves that would furnish sustenance to almost any number of horses; good grass covers the bottom and neighboring hills" (Raynolds, 1868, pp. 158–159).

20: Hungry Wolf I-4,5 (no date) 1980
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Blood

Smoking a tanned hide can turn it to several shades of either brown or yellow. This depends on the kind of wood you use, as well as how long you smoke it. Generally the lighter shades and colors are used for clothing, because they leave the leather softest. Dark smoked hide is generally used for moccasins, because it is most waterproofed.

The frame for holding up a hide is made either by setting up some short poles in the shape of a tipi frame or by setting willows into the ground and tying them to each other in the form of arches, like a small sweat lodge. A fire is built inside the framework and allowed to burn well until there is a good bed of coals. Then the actual wood for smoking the hide is placed on the coals, before the hide is draped over the framework. It is stitched or tied together to make a pretty tight enclosure, with the smoking wood inside. Rotten woods of various kinds are best for this. The important thing is to have plenty of smoke, but no fire. Open flames quickly scorch a hide beyond use, so the process has to be watched carefully.

I once smoked a hide inside a woodshed during the wintertime. A fire was built in an old bucket, and the rotten wood (cottonwood, in this case) was piled on top of the remaining coals. The hide was sewn shut except for a round opening at one end. Pieces of canvas were used to fill in any gaps where the hide joined together. The hide was hung from the ceiling of the woodshed by a cord. A skirt of canvas around the bottom reached the floor and kept the hide above the smoking wood. It took about three or four hours to smoke the whole elk hide.

OTHER CRAFTWORK

SINEW AND TOOLS

My grandmothers often made all their sewing equipment by hand, even after they could buy the materials from traders and stores.